

Music and its Many Memories: Complicating 1947 for the Punjab

Music is often invoked as the ‘glue’ that unites people, acting as a perennial symbol of a historically composite culture disrupted by the rupture of Partition.¹ This view posits a kind of pluralistic and decentered South Asian ‘musical citizenship’ that counters the narrow, antagonistic and populist definition of citizenship tied exclusively to either India or Pakistan.² We cannot easily transpose such views of cultural citizenship back into time as it leads to a gravely presentist reading of our musical pasts, and rides roughshod over the complex trajectories musicians’ lives took post-1947. At the same time, there is no doubt that the division of the sub-continent on the basis of religion instituted changes in the way music was conceptualized, patronized and understood in the fledgling twin-states of Pakistan and India. As demonstrated by Michael Nijhawan, partition “led to a redistribution of performative styles and repertoires”, with a greater emphasis on religious content.³ Virinder Kalra’s recent work on Punjab also demonstrates the overlapping boundaries between *kirtan* and *qawwali* music, and how over the course of the twentieth century, and particularly in the wake of Partition, the two “became Sikh and Muslim music, respectively... despite similarity in audibility and performer overlap.”⁴ He thus

¹ For a representative example, see Varun Soni, ‘India, Pakistan and the Musical Gurus of Peace’, 14 June, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/varun-soni/india-pakistan-and-the-music_606870.html Accessed 2 May 2017.

² This idea is derived from the IMR Distinguished Lecture Series, on ‘The Musical Citizen’ delivered by Martin Stokes, especially the first lecture on ‘How Musical is the Citizen?’, at the Senate House, University of London, 4th May, 2017. See <http://www.the-imr.uk/distinguished-lecture-series/> ; Accessed 1st May 2017. Stokes focused on the debates around citizenship which music has been meshed with, building on scholarship across disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology, ethnomusicology; ranging from Aihwa Ong’s concept of ‘flexible citizenship’ (1999) in globalized, transnational times, to Hannah Arendt’s critique of citizenship under totalitarian regimes (1951). See Aihwa Ong, *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); and Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York: Harcourt Brace And Company, 1951).

³ Michael Nijhawan, “Punjab’s *Dhadi* Tradition: Genre and Community in the Aftermath of Partition,” *Indian Folklife*, 3, no. 4 (October 2004): 5-7; see p. 7.

⁴ Virinder Kalra, *Sacred and Secular Musics: A Postcolonial Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014),

remarks how as a result of Partition, “musicians with broad repertoires began to restrict themselves in the face of a narrowing patronage.”⁵

In Pakistan, as noted by Pakistani scholar Saeed Malik and Indian documentary filmmaker Yousuf Saeed alike, there was a pro-active attempt to Islamicise music, by ridding it of any Hindu referents.⁶ In a parallel way, in India there was a strengthening of the trends of Hinduisation begun in the 19th century by Pt. Paluskar, the man who spearheaded the nationalisation and standardisation of Indian classical music, as well as a more conscious packaging of music as an ‘ancient’ cultural symbol that could represent the new India to the rest of the world.⁷ Yet, while we know of these broader changes in the musical landscape, the impact of Partition on the lives of musicians and artists has been little studied, scattered as it has been across disparate accounts of music, and different biographies of musicians.⁸ As a result, we lack a comprehensive account of the repercussions of this cataclysm on the quotidian lives of the subcontinent’s musicians, relying instead on superficial celebrations of music as a means of building unity and on assumptions about what came before Partition.⁹

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⁵ Ibid., 137. He also notes that, mainly account of their ascriptive identity as Muslims, the ‘remaining *rababis* in East Punjab no longer found patronage in *gurdwaras* and had to engage in the emerging state-sponsored folk art, with an emphasis on Sufi texts that were seen as part of a distant folk culture.’ Ibid.

⁶ Saeed Malik, *The Musical Heritage of Pakistan* (Islamabad: Idara Saqafat-e- Pakistan, 1983); Yousuf Saeed, “Fled is that Music”, *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3/4, the Great Divide (Winter 2008-Spring 2009), 238-249.

⁷ For more on Paluskar, see Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005). With the assertion of a monolithic Sikh identity in the late nineteenth century, music was also defined anew. See Bob van der Linden, *Music and Empire in Britain and India: Identity, Internationalism, and Cross-Cultural Communication*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Chapter 5 on “Sikh Sacred Music: Identity, Aesthetics, and Historical Change”, 129-156.

⁸ Barring the work of Yousuf Saeed, there has been little scholarly or sustained engagement on this theme. In 2008, along with Prof. Lakshmi Subramanian, Saeed co-organised a 2-day workshop in August 2008, on ‘Hindustani Music and Partition’ at New Delhi’s Jamia Millia Islamia, where musicians and musicologists from India, Pakistan and beyond participated. For details see <http://ektara.org/workshop08.html> ; Accessed 14 May 2017.

⁹ In contrast, there is a vast and proliferating literature detailing the impact of Partition on the literature, cinema and intellectual life of South Asia. For a representative and concise example, see Meenakshi

However, if we closely examine the life stories and views of a handful of musicians, we find that examples of 'Punjabiyaat'¹⁰ accompany instances of prejudice. The relationship of musicians to Partition and to religious difference, therefore, is complex and at times contradictory, and eludes simple characterization, positive or negative.

In this paper, I wish to examine, in preliminary terms, the impact of India's partition on practitioners of Hindustani classical music, in particular those belonging to the region of Punjab. Punjab provides an interesting case study, for three reasons. First, as Nijhawan, Kalra and Anjali Gera-Roy have established, the post-Partition restructuring of performance styles has blinded us to the more amorphous performative world of pre-1947 Punjab.¹¹ This is so, even as the shared cultural matrix of ideas and aesthetic sensibilities that characterized the undivided Punjab continues to resonate across the borders today in the many songs and traditions shared by people in West (Pakistan) and East (India) Punjab. Second, in Punjab the degree of personal rupture was more thorough, and achieved in lesser time, given the 'genocidal proportions' of the 1947 mass killings, which were in contrast to the lesser degree of violence on the Bengal side (which, with its more porous riverine borders, among other reasons, experienced a slower process of population exchange).¹² Third, while the work of

Mukherjee, "Dissimilar twins: residue of 1947 in the twenty-first century", *Social Semiotics*, 19, no. 4 (December 2009): 441-451.

¹⁰ Madan Gopal Singh has recounted to the author his early childhood memories of growing up in Amritsar, being able to tune in and listen to Radio Lahore, evoking how the idea of 'Punjabiyaat' in a broader 'radio republic', as it were, that integrates and subverts the border, re-connecting people. On Punjabiyaat, see Alyssa Ayres, "Language, the Nation, and Symbolic Capital: The Case of Punjab," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 67, no. 3 (August 2008): 917-946; Pritam Singh, "The idea of Punjabiyaat," *Himal Southasian* 23, no. 5 (2010): 55-57; and "Introduction: Punjab in History and Historiography" in Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (eds). *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), xv-lviii.

¹¹ See Anjali Gera-Roy, *Bhangra Moves: From Ludhiana to London and Beyond* (London: Ashgate, 2010), 22, 55, 72-75.

¹² Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 111. On the nature of Partition-induced migrations in Bengal, see Chapter 3, "Partition and migration: refugees in West Bengal, 1947-1967", 105-158. Chatterji demonstrates how the bulk of East Bengali Hindu peasants migrated much later, in the wake of communal conflagrations

Kalra and Nijhawan has addressed folk musicians, *dhadhhis* and performers of Sikh *kirtan* like the *Ragis* and *Rababis*, classical musicians have been neglected in theirs and other scholarly accounts of music in Punjab.¹³ Kalra briefly examines the discourse of colonial commentators and native elites, to conclude that “colonial modernity shaped and crafted designs” of both folk and classical music: while the latter “was able to service the new nation”, the former “remained the local residual and thus steeped in colonial terminology.”¹⁴ However, he doesn’t sufficiently account for the marginalization of the classical from discourses on Punjabi culture.¹⁵ In contrast, I wish to portray the importance of hereditary, Hindustani/art musicians for the regional Punjab context, to reveal how classical training had a relevance outside, and beyond, the paradigm of the nation in a more local milieu.¹⁶ I thus wish to challenge the symbolic alienation of the ‘classical’ from Punjab’s culture-in both popular and scholarly discourse. While doing so, I am mindful of the paradoxical locations that ‘classical’ music has historically had in the Punjab context, within spaces associated with ‘folk’, *qawwali*, or *gurbani* music-such as *melas* (fairs), or

beginning in 1949.

¹³ Kalra notes the connections between folk and classical in post-1947 Punjab, while noting the almost exclusive patronage of folk music in the Indian Punjab. Kalra, *Sacred*, 134-46.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 134-5.

¹⁵ While colonialism surely changed the ways in which Hindustani art (or Classical) music was perceived and organised in South Asia, it would be erroneous to assume that the binary between Classical and Folk, or *Margi* and *Desi* music was thoroughly a product of colonial modernity, as the assumption seems to be in Kalra. For a good summary of these debates, see Katherine Butler Schofield, ‘Reviving the Golden Age again: “Classicization”, Hindustani Music, and the Mughals,’ *Ethnomusicology*, 54 (2010), 484–517.

¹⁶ See my in-progress PhD thesis (expected June 2018). I wish to build on recent literature on the social histories of music in other regions, e.g. the recent PhD theses of Richard D. Williams and Sharmadip Basu on Bengal. For Rajasthan, see Daniel Neuman, Shubha Chadhuri and Komal Kothari, *Bards, Ballads, and Boundaries: An Ethnographic Atlas of Music Traditions in West Rajasthan*, (Oxford: Seagull Books, 2006); and more recently, Shalini Ayyagiri, “Spaces Betwixt and Between: Musical Borderlands and the Manganiyar Musicians of Rajasthan”, *Asian Music*, 43, no 1 (Winter/Spring 2012): 3-33.

shrines of Sufi saints. The celebration (both lay and academic) of genres of music performed *only* in these ‘popular’ spaces, symbolized semiotically by either a bucolic conviviality or a martial vigour, has obscured the important role played by classically trained, *gharana*-based musicians in the socio-cultural history of Punjab. By focusing on classical musicians in Punjab, whilst simultaneously being attentive to their connections with folk, *gurbani*, or *qawwali* music, I hope to offer a distinctive perspective within work on culture in modern South Asia.

The Shared Space of Music¹⁷

Undivided Punjab has historically been a site of communally amorphous culture-making. Ustad Badar-uz-Zaman of Lahore has described to Yousuf Saeed the “Zinda-dilan-e Lahaur” (lit., “Cheerful folk of Lahore”), an informal club of music lovers, constituted of cloth merchants, vegetable and meat sellers, who hosted evenings of classical music.¹⁸ In this, Punjab was not unusual; as Heidi Pauwels’ recent work demonstrates, musical and literary milieus in Delhi, what is now Rajasthan, and elsewhere, have long provided a location for dynamic and diverse forms of cultural exchange.¹⁹ In the colonial context, research on culture in Bengal (particularly Sumanta Banerjee’s earlier monograph, and Anindita Ghosh’s more recent one) has also noted the permeable boundaries between elite and popular cultures in South Asia, focusing instead on patterns of circulations between these two domains.²⁰

¹⁷ I borrow this term from Farina Mir’s idea of Punjabi *qisse* reflecting the existence of ‘shared notions of piety’. She posits this in opposition to the notion of ‘syncretism’, which presupposes a fixed, ‘pre-existing religious identity’, which was not representative for most of colonial Punjab. See Farina Mir, “Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives: Rethinking Cultural and Religious Syncretism” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 48, no. 3 (July 2006,): 727–58.

¹⁸ Yousuf Saeed, “Jugalbandi: Divided scores”, *Himal SouthAsian*, February 2011, <http://old.himalmag.com/component/content/article/3607-divided-scores.html>, Accessed 30 June 2016.

¹⁹ Heidi Pauwels, *Cultural Exchange in Eighteenth-Century India: Poetry and Paintings from Kishangarh* (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2015).

²⁰ Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and The Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989). Anindita Ghosh, *Power and Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778-1905* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

The question animating this paper is part of a larger project to explore the several ways in which people from Punjab have been viscerally connected through their shared poetry, music, and literature, despite the rigidity of borders. It is fitting that the panel leading up to this book, ‘Imagining a lost present: situating memory across/beyond Partition’, was organised in 2016, coinciding with the 250th birth year of renowned Punjabi poet Waris Shah, whose classic composition of the folktale of Heer-Ranjha has continued to unite scores of Punjabis across the border for the past 65 years.²¹ However, while the subversive power of music is well recognised, it would be hazardous to impose any kind of simplistic ‘syncretism’ on the musicians themselves. What musicians—then and now—thought of different circumstances, and of borders themselves, is not very easily categorized. Instead, musicians responded in ways that reflect their specific personal circumstances, just as they do other humans and agents. A focus on the musicians of Punjab during the 1940s and ‘50s, and indeed, even in the present, sensitizes us to how the hard borders (including visa-regimes, and passport issuance, etc.) engendered by 1947 did not appear overnight, but instead, materialized over what Vazira Zamindar has called the “Long Partition” of the sub-continent.²²

At one level, musicians are a group for whom borders are consistently envisaged as fluid, if not entirely irrelevant, given their historic tendency to be perennially on the move, in search of patronage and audiences. This physical mobility is also tied to

²¹ See the commemorative event held at SOAS, London on 6 September 2016, titled ‘250 Years of Waris Shah’s Heer’, where speakers included Amarjit Chandan, Mahmood Awan, Madan Gopal Singh, Nur Sobers-Khan, and Navtej Purewal: <https://www.soas.ac.uk/south-asia-institute/events/heritage-and-history-in-south-asia/06sep2016-250-years-of-waris-shahs-heer.html>; Accessed 11 May 2017.

²² Vazira Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

their institutional mobility, as liminal border-crossers, with their musical prowess helping them overcome the traditionally negative ascription of musicianship as a profession.²³ Perhaps it was in recognition of this tendency that the most famous classical musician produced by twentieth century Punjab, Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, said with a ringing certainty that if one child in every family across the subcontinent had learnt classical music, the violence accompanying Partition could have been avoided. Unfortunately, this was not the case, and Partition did take place, with calamitous, unintended, and sometimes surprising consequences for the subcontinent's musicians. Bade Ghulam Ali's somewhat rhetorical statements about the power of classical music are important at a deeper level too. One can read in his statement a celebration of the virtues of patience, the many years of rigorous practice required to become even a merely competent classical musician; this is in contrast to the immense speed with which Partition was achieved and the havoc it created in its wake.²⁴ Regardless of what he precisely meant, Bade Ghulam Ali recognized the power of music in preventing violence, and building peace; this is an area demanding critical research for South Asia.²⁵

In what follows, I explore the consequences of Partition on the musicians of the Punjab through the life-trajectories of two well-known musicians, Roshanara Begum and Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, and the views of two lesser-known ones Muhammad Hafeez Khan Talwandiware and Pt. Ramakant Sharma. I utilize the moment of Partition, and the divergent views it precipitated amongst musicians, to

²³ Katherine Butler Brown, "The Social Liminality of Musicians: Case Studies from Mughal India and Beyond", *Twentieth-Century Music*, 3 (2007): 13-49.

²⁴ I am grateful to Anne Murphy for this insight.

²⁵ In the western context, see Morag Josephine Grant, "Music and Human Rights", in Anja Mihr and Mark Gibney (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Human Rights, Vol. One* (Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC, Sage, 2014).

shed light on a more chequered social history of the musicians in the region. Section I of the paper explores the material changes and shifts in the lives of classical musicians in Punjab, as well as attempts at subverting and traversing the Radcliffe line made by musicians and their patrons. Section II, on the other hand, examines how musicians view the particular character of this divide; I illustrate that views around the *mirasis*, Punjab's caste of hereditary musician-genealogists, became especially central to it. While a Pakistani musician attributes the decline in patronage to the loss of patrons, and consistently defined the *mirasis* as a plague and a negative force to be reckoned with, an Indian counterpart patronizingly appropriates to India the status of "saviour" of the *mirasis*. In both cases, views regarding these two contradictory groups—the *mirasi* at the low end of the spectrum, and elite, state-supported patrons on the other—are at the heart of understanding the differences in the life of music between India and Pakistan. Finally, Section III takes a step back to consider the recurring trope of nostalgia, delineating its centrality for musicians in South Asia. In the case of musicians affected by Partition, I argue for the existence of a 'double nostalgia': one for a better time of musical patronage, performance and audience appreciation, as well as for the undivided space that existed in the pre-Partition times. Throughout the paper, my concern is with how musicians viewed: a) the shared past; b) their musical worlds and communities of musicians across borders and c) differences in state patronage in India and Pakistan.

I. Musicians and the Materiality of Partition

Khalid Basra's excellent and intensive ethnography of the Talwandi *gharana*, now based in Lahore, sheds light on the attitudes of musicians towards socio-political developments. Us. Muhammad Hafeez Khan Talwandiwalé, came from a long lineage

of *dhrupad* musicians, whose family moved from East Punjab to the newly setup canal colony of Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) in West Punjab in the early twentieth century when his grandfather Mian Maula Bakhsh (1845-1930) accepted the invitation of wealthy Sikh landlords. For the family of Hafeez Khan Talwandiwalé, Partition meant the loss of a patron, when the family patron Sardar Harcharan Singh had to move to India, in the wake of the violence of 1947. The interviews of Hafeez Khan taken by Basra abound in nostalgia for the abundance of pre-Partition Faisalabad. At one point he tells Basra of the pre-Partition abundance of the family albeit with a hint of exaggeration,

Before partition our circumstances were such that father used to bring fruit and it used to be packed in neat boxes wrapped in cotton - grapes, citrus, litchis- such top quality fruit. His income in those days was at least Rs. 500/- per day... *Our financial position was such that we used to play hockey with fruit.* Mother also used to have three changes of clothes a day... of course after Partition conditions went from bad to worse...²⁶

The invocation of an abundance of quality food in pre-Partition Punjab is of course a common nostalgic trope across Partition narratives, and is noted by Basra elsewhere as well.²⁷

The life-trajectory and career of another Punjabi musician, who hailed from west Punjab, and migrated eastwards to India a few years after Partition is our other major case study. Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, the iconic and legendary vocalist of the Kasur-Patiala *gharana*, faced a problem of patronage in the newly fledgling state of Pakistan. Recognizing greater avenues for survival in India, and disgruntled with the Islamicisation of music in Pakistan,²⁸ Bade Ghulam Ali migrated to India, lured by

²⁶ Khalid Basra, “‘A Garland of razors’: The Life of a Traditional Musician in Contemporary Pakistan,” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, SOAS, January 1996), 320, Emphasis added.

²⁷ “The Sikh patron Sardar Harcharan Singh provided the family with a large house, and was also responsible for supplying them with grain, vegetables, milk, etc. Other pupils like the Hindu barrister Amarnath were also *lavish patrons* of the family.” Ibid.

²⁸ See Basra, “A Garland,” 128-129, for an account of this. He quotes from the Public Relations

the offer of Indian citizenship by Jawaharlal Nehru, and the encouragement of music-loving politicians like Morarji Desai.²⁹ This was also a result of Bade Ghulam Ali's famous tiff with the famous and powerful Director of Radio Pakistan Z.A. Bokhari, when the latter apparently dismissed Bade Ghulam Ali's singing as 'below the level of acceptability.'³⁰

Yet, despite the official narrative of the positive reception afforded to Bade Ghulam Ali by representatives of the so-called 'secular' Indian nation, and its more open-minded patrons, India posed other problems. A brief example from the Harballabh music festival of Jalandhar (on which more below) during the 1950s bears this out. Harballabh has been feted as a place where musicians performed for a minimal fee, given its status a space of devotionism, where musicians performed for more mystical reasons. Elsewhere, I have shown the origins of the festival in 1875 in a tradition of cosmopolitan devotionism (with *dhrupad* music as the primary genre performed), which shifted by the turn of the 20th century, to a more Hindu devotional sphere, thanks to the efforts of Pt. Paluskar, who also popularized *khayal* across India, and especially at the Harballabh.³¹ However, the turn to greater professionalisation ushered in under Mr. Ashwini Kumar, who was charged with the organization of the festival (on whom more below), was seen as a negative development by many old Harballabh hands, like Jagannath Parti, one of the founder members of the *Sangeet*

Directorate Radio Pakistan which goaded Pakistani musicians to "draw inspiration from the music of other Muslim countries", and lauded the efforts of those composers who created "compositions based on Arabic and Iranian music forms."

²⁹ Malti Gilani and Qurratulain Haidar, *Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan "Sabrang": His Life and Music*, (New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, 2003).

³⁰ Basra, "A Garland", 325.

³¹ Radha Kapuria, "Rethinking Musical Pasts: The Harballabh Music Festival of Punjab", *Social Scientist*, 43, No. 5-6 (May-June 2015): 77-91. In his otherwise valuable book, Virinder Kalra erroneously claims that the Harballabh had undergone a process of nationalisation and religious revival prior to the arrival of Paluskar, when, in fact, the evidence points to the contrary. Kalra, *Sacred*, 61. As I have demonstrated in my MPhil thesis, Paluskar's visits to the Harballabh (among other reasons) were the prime motivating factor that impelled the organisers to change the character of the festival from a fair to a concert resembling those organised in *metropoli* like Lahore, Bombay and Calcutta.

Mahasabha in 1922. The finger of blame was unequivocally pointed in the direction of Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali's insistence on a fee for performance, who was contrasted with the more pious (and unsurprisingly, Hindu) performers of the past³²—mostly students of Pt. Paluskar, who himself had inaugurated the era of a nationalized, Hindu devotional avatar for Indian classical music, coupled with a suspicion of dancing girls and Muslim performers.³³

This example illustrates the hidden hostility exhibited by upper-caste Hindu music patrons and audience members towards even the most accomplished of Punjabi Muslim musicians. It is no wonder then that not all Punjabi Muslim musicians felt as secure staying on in India as Khan *saheb*: to counterweigh the substantial presence of a sole Bade Ghulam Ali Khan (who chose to migrate to India only in hindsight), there was a greater outflow of legendary classical musicians from eastern Punjab to Pakistan. These included Patiala *gharana* doyens like Fateh Ali-Amanat Ali³⁴ and the brothers Salamat-Nazakat Ali, exponents of the Sham Chaurasi *gharana*, amongst many others.

Ashwini Kumar, the man responsible for the modernization of the Harballabh classical music festival in Jalandhar in the Indian Punjab, represents a mature form of nationalism, not grounded in cultural exclusivism. One of India's highly decorated policemen, he went on to become the Director-General of the Border Security Force,

³² Kapuria, "Muse for Music", 99-103.

³³ For a more detailed account of Paluskar's reception in Punjab, see James Kippen, *Gurudev's Drumming Legacy* (London: Ashgate 2006), 24-6. For a more general account on Paluskar, apart from Bakhle's seminal work, see Michael David Rosse, "The Movement for the Revitalization of 'Hindu' Music in Northern India, 1860-1930: The Role of Associations and Institutions", (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1995).

³⁴ Fateh Ali-Amanat Ali made their first spectacular debut in Lahore in 1945, thanks to the sponsorship of Pt. Jeevan Lal Matto, Program Executive of the All India Radio in the city. Matto was also the man responsible for spotting the musical talent in a young Mohammed Rafi, who was working at a barber's shop in Lahore, and encouraging him to sing on Radio.

one of the high points of his illustrious career. He retired as the Director-General of the Border Security Force and was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1972 for his outstanding service in the Indo–Pak War of 1965. He also modernised the Harballabh festival, which he had attended since childhood, in the 1950s. His favourite vocalist was Calcutta-born Roshanara Begum, cousin of the legendary Ustad Abdul Karim Khan, who went on to become one of Pakistan’s most accomplished female classical musicians. She migrated to Pakistan in 1948, with her husband who hailed from Lala Musa of the Gujrat region in West Punjab. In a 2011 interview, Kumar recounted the story of surreptitiously collaborating with Roshanara Begum’s husband (who, like him, was a policeman) to enable her to cross the border, so that she could perform at Harballabh.

People were ready to pay 10 lakhs for (her to sing) a 10-minute raga in Bombay. They would say, please just do the ‘aaa’ of an ‘alaap’; she still didn’t come. Her husband was a policeman, so that’s how I got to her. He used to be in the police in Bombay, then in Pakistan.

When I went to Lahore, I called her husband. I said: Please ask your wife to come and perform at Jalandhar. She sang... and I tell you, (even) Bhimsen Joshi couldn’t control the crowd that night, it was so rowdy. I said (to her), you go and sit. She sang, the moment she said “aaaa”, the whole crowd, must have been about 15-20,000 people, it was raining outside, winter, 27th of December, they wanted to listen to her. With one hour, she captured the audience, and stilled the entire crowd.³⁵

This example demonstrates how Kumar utilized his pre-colonial professional ties in the police bureaucracy to actually subvert the Radcliffe line, so that an Indian audience could revel in the unparalleled artistry of a Pakistani musician. His musical zeal thus existed simultaneously with his status as an Indian policeman at the forefront of a war against Pakistan, revealing the complications and contradictions in the postcolonial middle-class patronage of music in India.

³⁵ Interview with Ashwini Kumar dated 2nd February 2013.

These narratives of migration across the border came together in real time, when the organisers of the Harballabh festival in 2011 scaled immense bureaucratic hurdles to ensure the performance of Lahore-based dhrupad musicians of the Talwandi *gharana*. Exponents of this *gharana* were performing in Jalandhar after almost 135 years, when their forebear Miyan Qalandar Bakhsh was first offered a *nazrana* (homage) of one-and-a-half rupees by the mahant of the Devi Talab *sakti peeth* site and festival-founder Baba Harballabh, as an invitation to come and perform there.

Regardless of how Partition impeded musicians from performing across the 1947 borders, there exist numerous instances indicating how these boundaries did not daunt all musicians. In a version of the Roshanara Begum anecdote, Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's father and uncle, who migrated to Pakistan in 1947 (but were originally based in Jalandhar's Pathan *bastis* or settlements), made the journey back to their hometown in 1952 simply by way of pilgrimage—to perform at the annual *urs mela* (fair) held at the shrine of Sufi saint Hazrat Imam Nasr. Jalandhar's Hindu and Sikh residents apparently turned out in vast numbers to listen to their former co-residents perform at the legendary fair after a gap of more than five years.³⁶ Thus, the very real boundaries were also subverted at times, allowing for performance opportunities across the border. At the same time, however, older caste prejudices continued to create *internal* borders, within individual national contexts.

II. Classical Musicians and *Mirasis*

Pt. Ramakant Sharma, *tabla* maestro, who retired as the seniormost teacher of music (*tabla*) at the old Kanya Mahavidyalaya of Jalandhar, and a long-time performer at the

³⁶ Anecdote narrated by Jalandhar-based musician Mohan Malsiani in an interview dated 19th October 2011. Malsiani recounted listening in rapt attention, as a young man, to the *qawwalis* they performed in the saint's honour.

Harballabh, hails from a family from the Nurmahal district close to Jalandhar that had participated in the freedom struggle. He represents the devotional Hindu strain of performers at the Harballabh, who, whilst participating in its Hindu façade and veneer, nonetheless had a somewhat romantic-nostalgic view of the *mirasis*.

There has been a tradition of having Mirasis in Punjab, even though common people viewed them negatively, yet there was also such a time when *these very* Mirasis nourished music, kept it alive.... To a great extent they kept our classical music alive.

Also, *just look* at the regard in which they are held here, these people don't enjoy the same respect in Pakistan... Over there 60-70 per cent people don't view the Mirasis from a good perspective. I have seen this: the High Commissioner of India used to say that *the Mirasi who has crossed the Ravi dariya (river), he goes to India and becomes Allah (God)*.

*You see, before Partition, whatever mehfiles used to take place were primarily run by Hindus. No body used to differentiate (between people)... (but), for those who used to sing, it were the children of the Hindus who touched their feet, and took their blessings, (even) ate together—there was no differentiation. Because the “vidya” (knowledge) of music is ‘Brahm Vidya’.*³⁷

After proffering a (somewhat grudging) acknowledgement of the positive role played by the ‘socially low’ *mirasis*, Ramakant thus glorifies India, while at the same time, looking down at Pakistan from a superior, subtly condescending position. We also witness Ramakant's tendency to generalize and attribute all positive patronage of art musicians to ‘India’ and/or Hindus. This positioning is typical: India is often seen-by musicians on both sides of the border-as a space with greater avenues for the fostering and reproduction of classical music.³⁸

³⁷ Interview dated 24th October 2011, in Kapuria, “A Muse for Music”, 300-20.

³⁸ In this regard, the eminent Pakistani musicologist and inventor of the Sagar Veena, Raza Kazim—who migrated in 1947 from Lucknow—argued in a 2009 interview with filmmaker Yousuf Saeed that despite the veneer of state patronage, classical music in India was not doing well either. See Yousuf Saeed, *Khayal Darpan: ‘A Mirror of Imagination’*, New Delhi: Ektara, 2007.

Yet, despite an external patronizing attitude and the apparent encouragement proffered vis-à-vis the *mirasis* in India, as we see in Ramakant's account, there has been, on the whole, a steady current of censure towards this community. Similarly, in the worldview of Pakistan-based Hafeez Khan, who had inherited the majority of *mirasi* students "from his father, grandfather, and other ancestors through various pupillary linkages",³⁹ we find a strongly negative stereotype and 'Othering' of the *mirasis*. Otherwise praised for their "profound understanding of the *ustad-shagird* [master-student] relationship", they were condemned for their 'dangerous' proclivity to "pass off the knowledge learnt from the *ustad* as 'inherited'. They attempt to fabricate identities and use the knowledge, the composition and *rags* as weighty evidence in the politics of pedigree."⁴⁰ In the following quote on the *mirasis*, Hafeez Khan sets up a strict dichotomy between the *mirasi* and more accomplished purveyors of classical music, or *gavayyahs*:

So in the villages all the Sikhs and other *dihati* [rural] people etc., got hooked on to their *rags* [throat movement] *avazaan* [peculiar voice culture] and manner and style of singing. When the *riasats* finished and the *gavayyahs* came to these towns and places these '*mirasis*' had already been accepted as *gavayyahs*. Their voices were very different. *Gavayyahs*' voices were polished and cultured whereas their [*mirasis*'s] voices were raw and uncouth like *dangaris*; tremulous and thick and loud like the village watchmen who boast of having the capability of being heard across the village. Sikhs used to like these voices a lot as these resembled theirs and accepted them (as *gavayyahs*). This is also a reason for the downfall of classical music.⁴¹

Hafeez Khan thus constructs a clear connection between *mirasis* and the Sikhs— ascribing to them the common quality of being 'uncouth', and 'loud', and indeed holding them responsible for the downfall of the classical in Punjab.

³⁹ Basra, "A Garland", 101.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 111-2. More references to the ignominies of being a *mirasi* are found on 113; and 208-211.

Ironically, though unsurprisingly, many Sikhs themselves saw the *mirasis* as being extraneous to the Punjab itself. For example, the Sikh Memorandum to the Boundary Commission argued against the division of Punjab, which they claimed, belonged more to them than other Punjabis. Pointing to the long history of Sikh-Muslim antagonism, the political machinations of the Muslim League and Congress, and mainly to counter the Muslim predominance in the population of Punjab, they singled out the “floating population”, around 31% of the entire Punjabi Muslim population, comprising, among others, mendicants, cobblers, blacksmiths, potters, bards, and *mirasis*, a group which:

is not rooted in the soil of the Punjab and is essentially of a floating character. The floating population amongst the Hindus and Sikhs, according to the census returns, is almost nil....⁴²

It is interesting how, on account of their itinerant nature, *mirasis* and other low-status Punjabi Muslims are seen as being ‘un-Punjabi’ and extraneous to the land, by representatives of the Sikh Memorandum to the Commission.⁴³ In short, on account of their lower caste status, all middle-class and elite Punjabis, regardless of religious orientation, roundly castigated the *mirasis*.

To return to the Talwandi *gharana*, closely examining Hafeez Khan’s views helps us see the very real effects of division. His eagerness to re-claim *dhrupad* as an Islamic practice (where the genre’s characteristic *alaap gayaki* (singing) is claimed to be a corruption of ‘Allah Aap’ or ‘God Thyself’⁴⁴), as well as negatively stereotyping Sikhs and *mirasis* as being cut from the same (musical) cloth, can be situated in the social and ideological attitudes of a Pakistan preoccupied with Islamicisation. This

⁴² “Sikh Memorandum to the Punjab Boundary Commission”, in Kirpal Singh (ed.), *Select Documents on the Partition of the Punjab 1947*, (New Delhi: National Book Shop, 1991), 226-63.

⁴³ This was not necessarily the view of all Sikhs in Punjab.

⁴⁴ I borrow this translation from Saeed, “Fled is That Music”, 2009, 242.

contrasts both with his positive romantic-nostalgic memories of pre-Partition Sikh and Hindu patrons, and the adoption of certain Hindu-Sikh practices (such as not eating beef).

In both India and Pakistan, however we have seen how the *mirasis* function in tropes of self-identification that the more elite *kalawant* musicians narrate and believe about themselves. Lower caste communities—*mirasi* and *kanjris*—viewed from a derogatory lens, are at the heart of this variety of “Othering”. Observing views of musicians across the divide therefore reveals how the “Other” is often not simplistically the enemy nation; rather, older asymmetries (on the lines of caste) persist, and are re-enforced, common to musicians on both sides of the border. The hostility towards *mirasis* remains a constant, throughout time and across space.

III. A Double Nostalgia: Imagining Alternative Pasts and Futures

There have been attempts to revive Punjabiya through music, theatre, and other cultural forms in recent years. Navtej Purewal, among others, has noted the substantial cultural efforts in contemporary times to transgress borders.⁴⁵ Musicians have been at the forefront of this transgression, for sound is a medium that has relentlessly offered an opportunity for subverting manmade boundaries, and musical memory has always been perpetuated and shared, across these hard borders. Throughout South Asia, resident in the memories of music-lovers are scenes and settings of music, prior to and beyond national borders. For example, M.A. Sheikh’s reminiscences about a *soiree* in pre-Partition Lahore where a young and teenaged

⁴⁵ There have been successive attempts, in independent India and Pakistan, at subverting the effects on the cultural life of the nation as created by the borders of 1947. The efforts of the Pakistan India People’s Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD), have, in particular been inspiring. For a more general account of these efforts, see N. Purewal, ‘The Indo-Pak border: displacements, aggressions and transgressions’, *Contemporary South Asia*, 12:4, 2003, 539-556.

Roshanara Begum supposedly defeated Bade Ghulam Ali Khan belongs to a cultural space where the 1947 borders are irrelevant, regardless of the fact that those two musicians later became inscribed as citizens of rival nations.⁴⁶ Studying the ‘broader cultural “whole” of Hindustani art music that has historically existed across the length and breadth of north India, across religious and linguistic lines, is thus a productive site for tracking subversion to the 1947 borders.

Given the fact that Bade Ghulam Ali’s hometown was Kasur, in the Pakistani Punjab, and that much of his professional life was spent in Lahore, toward the end of his life, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan deeply longed for his hometown, including the quality of the land, the water, and especially the grain and other food-related experiences. Svetlana Boym’s pithy and humorous words, about the conditions in which nostalgia can flourish, are rather apt here, since “nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship.”⁴⁷ We have already noted Hafeez Khan’s longing for the flourishing patronage and cultural (even agricultural!) milieu of pre-Partition Lyallpur. In Roshanara Begum’s interviews too, we find her professing nostalgic memories and love for her native Calcutta, and the cities of Bombay and Lucknow (from where her family hailed) and for the audiences of the first two cities.⁴⁸ Hence, we note a strain also of nostalgia for learned audiences of connoisseurs, who could appreciate the intricacies of the classical.

We thus encounter mirror images of nostalgia for musical forms and cultural milieus on opposite sides of the border. There is need to distinguish between the temporal

⁴⁶ M.A. Sheikh, *Great Masters, Great Music*, (Xlibris Corporation: 2010).

⁴⁷ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 18.

⁴⁸ See Roshanara Begum’s PTV ‘Program Mulaqat’ interview by Khalil Ahmad and M Iqbal: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjstjdxlVhE>.

nostalgia for a different time, i.e. the time of the past, and the nostalgia for undivided Punjab, undergirded by visions of *Punjabiyat*. The first is what Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, in an incisive article on the social location of Begum Akhtar, calls the “nostalgia for the feudal past.”⁴⁹ In the case of Punjab, a second is the nostalgia for the shared past of pre-Partition times. Nostalgia is important, because “unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.”⁵⁰ Boym also cautions us against nostalgia without an eye to the future, because, “fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future.”⁵¹

We see in these memories then, a nostalgia for an alternative past that has been lost. This is embodied in physical structures,⁵² symbols of a now forgotten musical past. ‘Pul Kanjri’ or ‘Tawaifpul’ (the Bridge of the Dancing Girl) is located between Amritsar and Lahore, near the present-day Wagah border. This abandoned precinct is primarily a bridge that included at one point, “a *dharamsala*, a well, a tank, a garden and a *sarai*”⁵³; was built for, and on the insistence of, the Muslim courtesan who went on to become Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s favourite wife, ‘Moran Sarkar’. A structure located on the present-day border of the two states, and one which was briefly conquered in skirmishes by both nations for a while: Pakistan in 1965, and then “reclaimed” by India in 1971. If “consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales”, as Boym urges us to do, then we must take a

⁴⁹ Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, “In Search of Begum Akhtar: Patriarchy, Poetry, and Twentieth-Century Indian Music”, *The World of Music*, 43, no. 1, Ethnomusicology and the Individual (2001): 97-137.

⁵⁰ Boym, *Future*, 27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵² See Churnjeet Mahn’s paper in this volume on the Aam Khas Bagh complex in Sirhind.

⁵³ Ganesh Das, *Early Nineteenth Century Panjab: From Ganesh Das’s “Char Bagh-i-Panjab”*, translated by Grewal and Banga, (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1975), 139.

newer look at the past, and excavate fresher stories from it, about the divergent figures peopling it.⁵⁴ The story of Bibi Moran, Ranjit's favourite wife, for whom he braved stiff Sikh orthodoxy, is one such story, pointing to a time of remarkable cosmopolitanism, when many parts of Punjab witnessed a cultural efflorescence, where religious and/or political ideologies failed to stifle art.⁵⁵

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted how the lives of musicians were impacted by 1947. First, the reasons for migration across the borders during and after 1947 have been varied: marriage (Roshanara Begum and Iqbal Bano); career progression and professional recognition (Bade Ghulam Ali Khan); and, of course, the most common factors, fear of violence (*mirasis* from Pakistan (in Ramakant's view); Nusrat's father and uncles; and the Talwandiwalas's patron Sardar Harcharan Singh). We also discussed some important examples of border crossings post-1947: Ashwini Kumar and Roshanara Begum, Nusrat's father and uncle coming to perform at Jalandhar, plus many more. These border-crossings stand out in sharp relief in the context of increasing intolerance toward cultural expression in South Asia—whether Hindu Right wing activists in India asking for a ban on performances by Pakistani artistes today, or of Islamist groups attacking musicians (as in the brutal assassination of Pakistani *qawwal* Amjad Sabri in 2016).

⁵⁴ Boym, *Future*, 26.

⁵⁵ The Maharaja's marriage with Moran brought his way severe opposition from the orthodoxy: he was summoned to the Akal Takht and awarded the punishment of a hundred lashes, which he apparently went forth to receive valiantly. H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs, Vol. V: The Sikh Lion of Lahore (Maharaja Ranjit Singh, 1799-1839)*, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1991), 35. For more, see Chapter 1 on "Musicians and Dancers in Pre-Colonial Punjab, with a focus on Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Court", in Radha Kapuria (in-progress PhD, expected June 2018), "Music in Colonial Punjab: A Social History", King's College London.

Second, divisions of caste and community in the eyes of musicians themselves, have persisted across the border: practitioners of Classical music across the border, have in common an ‘Othering’ of, and distancing from, the *mirasis*. The ambivalent, and consistently negative attitude toward *mirasis*, which has a longer genealogy, perhaps holds a clue to the outlying of the classical in Punjab.⁵⁶ Partition, and the exclusions and tensions manifest within it, drew on existing issues and tensions in the social fabric that preceded it—which adversely impacted practices comprising the shared spaces of Punjab.⁵⁷ As we saw, elite *kalawant* musicians such as Pt. Ramakant and Us. Hafeez Khan—regardless of their own social origins—held a common disdain for Punjab’s *mirasis*. Whether Indian or Pakistani, therefore, maintaining a strict social distance from the *mirasis* is a crucial marker for ‘respectability’ of professional, *gharana*-based musicians in both Punjabs.

Finally, Partition inaugurated a new era: in some cases marked by what I have called a ‘double nostalgia’ for the a) the feudal past comprised of benevolent patrons (as exemplified in Us. Hafeez Khan’s discourse) and b) the shared past of ‘Punjabiyaat’ (evident in Bade Ghulam Ali’s interviews). We also witnessed other results: a self-congratulatory nationalism and condescension towards conditions for musical production in Pakistan (Pt. Ramakant); and an emphasis on *dhrupad*’s Islamic origins, combined with an ‘Othering’ of both *mirasis* and Sikhs (Us. Hafeez Khan).

⁵⁶ See Chapter 2 “A Genealogy of the *Mirasis* and *Kanjris* in Colonial Punjab”, in my in-progress PhD.

⁵⁷ Anil Sethi’s research excavated the shift from the secular to the religious in naming practices in 19th century Punjab, Sethi, “The Creation”, 66-71. On the practices, e.g. ritual and public mourning among others, shared by women across religious boundaries in Punjab, see Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste and Religious Boundaries: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

The impact of the 1947 borders on the new nation-state dispensations is thus very evident in the minutiae of everyday life, and in quotidian notions about music, and musical communities. These beliefs, held by practicing classical musicians on both sides of the border, coupled with the troubled legacies of musical genres emerging from a century of socio-religious reform and division, reveal the futility of glibly romanticizing musicians as carriers of a ‘syncretic’ phenomenon. Rather, this paper has tried to re-situate musicians and patrons as historical agents functioning within complex and diverse historical contexts.

While I have consciously focused more on views of and around musicians, and less on the music itself, future research needs to map musicians’ specific memories of trauma, violence and loss in 1947, employing ethnography and biography. More crucially, it will need to excavate how the primacy of the moment of performance itself may hold the power to transform prejudice or hostility.⁵⁸ Roshanara Begum’s command over the restless crowds at Harballabh, mentioned in the anecdote related by Ashwini Kumar, is a good example of the power of music. Further, as we know from the extensive literature on the *impact* of Indian music, especially the *ta’sir* (effect on the listener and the supernatural world) of a *Raga*⁵⁹, music can also have the opposite result. An anecdote on 1947, featuring two foremost Delhi-based musicians, with significant ties to the Patiala *gharana* and court, captures this:⁶⁰

⁵⁸ For the proactive uses of music in current-day peacebuilding in Palestine, see Yara El-Ghadban and Kiven Strohm, ‘The Ghosts of Resistance: Dispatches from Palestinian Art and Music’, in *Palestinian Music and Song: Expression and Resistance since 1900*, ed. Moslih Kanaaneh, Stig-Magnus Thorsén, Heather Bursheh, David A. McDonald (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 175-200.

⁵⁹ Munshi Muhammad Karam Imam Khan, *Ma’dan al-musiqi* (Lucknow: Hindustani Press, 1925), 111-16; quoted in Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield, eds. *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), 26-7.

⁶⁰ I am grateful to Ayyub Auliya, the London-based independent music historian, for sharing with me this anecdote—that he read in an Urdu translation of a collection of essays by B.R. Deodhar.

At a musical soiree in early 1947 in Delhi, the renowned *sarangi* player Ustad Bundu Khan⁶¹ insisted on playing *Raga Deepak*, a Raga charged with the brilliance and power to create fire. This was despite protestations from his cousin, foremost vocalist of the Delhi *gharana*, Ustad Chand Khan.⁶² Later that year, the entire subcontinent was consumed by the fire of mass violence that spread across the land. Chand Khan went on to lay the blame solely on his cousin's shoulders, exclaiming, 'I had told you, hadn't I, not to play this sinister ('*manhoos*') Raga?'

This anecdote holds a clue as to how at least some musicians made sense of the frenzy, insanity, and 'fire' of 1947, attempting to understand it through a musical metaphor, squarely outside the rational causes of 'high politics' or other explanations. Perhaps this was an attempt to locate a modicum of control (albeit allegorical) within musicians' hands, during an otherwise chaotic and utterly tumultuous time? Ultimately, the anecdote holds a key for metaphorically countering *Deepak*'s fiery impact with the cathartic showers of a *Raga Megh*, in the way Tansen's daughter Saraswati purportedly did at Akbar's 16th century court;⁶³ a possibility more relevant than ever for South Asia in 2017.

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⁶¹ Ustad Bundu Khan hailed from a Rajasthani family that later settled in Delhi. His uncle and *guru*, Ustad Mamman Khan was connected to the Patiala tradition and court. See Daniel Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India: The Organisation of an Artistic Tradition* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1980), 156; and Regula Qureshi, *Master Musicians of India: Hereditary Sarangi Players Speak*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 185.

⁶² See Neuman, *Life*, 157. According to Amal Das Sharma, Ustad Chand Khan served as court musician at the Patiala court from 1913-37. Amal Das Sharma, *Musicians of India*, (Calcutta: Noya Prokash, 1993).

⁶³ Bonnie C. Wade, *Imaging Sound: An Ethnomusicological Study of Music, Art, and Culture in Mughal India*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 116-7.

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